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JACK ANDERSON

Mexico Makes Its Presidents Millionaires

Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, who is scheduled to meet with President Reagan in the White House today, has amassed a multi-million-dollar fortune since he took office, according to classified U.S. intelligence documents.

Self-enrichment is a tradition among Mexican presidents; it also may be perfectly legal under Mexican law.

The presidential salary is secret, and the single political party's only rule, according to one insider, is: "Don't rock the trough."

Perhaps in deference to his country's precarious financial situation and the extreme poverty of its people, de la Madrid is believed to have collected a secret "salary" far more modest than his predecessors'. It is, nevertheless, huge.

One high-level administration source with access to secret intelligence reports told my associate Dale Van Atta that in one series of transactions in the four months after he took office in December, 1982, de la Madrid salted away \$13 million to \$14 million in a Swiss bank.

Another source with access to CIA and National Security Agency data cited one report last fall, based on cable intercepts of international bank transactions, that put the total of de la Madrid's "take" during his presidency at a minimum of \$162 million.

At the CIA, the six-year presidential term is referred to jokingly as the "golden parachute" that carries every president safely to a sizable fortune.

Efforts to reach de la Madrid for comment were unsuccessful, but a spokesman at the Mexican Embassy said the U.S. intelligence information was wrong, "absolutely out of the question."

He pointed out that de la Madrid has been mounting an aggressive anti-corruption campaign.

That, too, is an honored presidential tradition in Mexico. De la Madrid's immediate predecessor, Jose Lopez Portillo, went through the same ritual, calling corruption "the cancer of Mexico."

Yet Lopez Portillo, who ruled during the heady days of Mexico's short-lived oil prosperity, amassed a personal fortune. By the CIA's estimate, he salted away a staggering \$1 billion to \$3 billion.

The symbol of Lopez Portillo's wealth is the luxurious, 32-acre estate he built overlooking Mexico City. It is nicknamed "Dog Hill," in mocking reference to Lopez Por-

tillo's statement that he would "fight like a dog" to defend the shrinking value of the peso.

While many of his countrymen live in adobe or corrugated metal hovels, Lopez Portillo and his family have bathrooms of marble and gold, according to Mexican press accounts.

Some floors are made of jade; one is transparent, with a detailed model of the Acropolis visible through it.

The Mexican government installed a power plant for what a Mexican magazine called the "walled medieval fortress overlooking the capital." The public works agency spent \$33 million on the access road, sewage and water lines for Lopez Portillo's estate.

The ex-president's largess reportedly extended even to a high-level government official who was his alleged mistress.

Her house is said to be so large that one of the closets measures 27 feet by 100 feet and has a mezzanine.

Despite the blatancy of Lopez Portillo's self-enrichment in office, U.S. and Mexican sources doubt that he will ever be a target of his successor's cleanup campaign.

Instead, de la Madrid has moved against some officials of the former president's regime, including the former head of the national oil monopoly and the former chief of Mexico City's police.